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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the State role in providing education for its citizens in a changing society. The author suggests that, although the idea of local responsibility for education is still valid, States should be responsible for developing adequate educational policies for local systems to implement. The report also suggests that the States, in cooperation with citizens, must provide effective planning for improvement of education. Societal changes that the author sees are (1) an interest in consumerism and environment, (2) a trend to urbanization, and (3) a transition from a complacent to a questioning society. (JF)

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STATE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION IN THE 1970's: Significant Recent and Prospective Changes in Society That Have Important Implications for the States*

In most societies, and certainly in this country, there are always many kinds of conflicting cross currents, tendencies and trends, partly because there are such wide differences in the beliefs, values, insights and aspirations of the citizens. There have always been, and probably always will be, people who are more interested in exploiting the natural and human resources of the nation or of the world than in helping to develop a better and more viable civilization. From the beginning we have had a generous supply of exploiters, many of whom have become rich and powerful enough to influence the policies of the nation for the benefit of their own kind regardless of the implications for the welfare and progress of others or the long-range consequences for the nation.

But, partly because more people are better educated than ever before--even though the education provided was and still is inadequate or unrealistic for many--and because the unfortunate consequences of earlier exploitative policies have become so obvious, substantial numbers of citizens now realize that many policies followed in the past, and apparently many current policies, are no longer defensible.

Many recent and prospective changes in society have important implications for all aspects of education including--but certainly not restricted to--the role, functions and relationships of state education agencies. During the time allotted I can discuss only a

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few developments I consider especially important for state education agencies and comment briefly on some of the more obvious implications.

Differences Between Beliefs and Actions

As Willis Harman has so appropriately commented, there always has been, and continues to be, a dangerous gap between what we say we believe and what we do.* For example, we say we believe in equality of opportunity and equity for taxpayers. But we do not have anything even closely approaching equality of educational opportunities for many students in most parts of the nation. Few states make any provision for early childhood education, several states still do not even authorize the use of public funds for kindergartens, the provisions made for minorities and other disadvantaged are notoriously inadequate, and many programs and procedures are not relevant to the present or emerging needs of substantial number of students or adults. Moreover, as recent court decisions have held or implied, many states still guarantee by law serious inequities for taxpayers and, therefore, ensure that, at least until some important policies and laws are changed, many students will continue to be denied adequate and equitable opportunities for learning.

From the time this nation was established, most people have continued to discuss with pride the provisions for what we call "local control of education," but, because of restrictive laws and other developments, we find that in many parts of the nation there is no longer much evidence even of meaningful local responsibility. Under modern conditions, the concept of local control of education is

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*Willis W. Harman, "The Nature of Our Changing Society: Implications for Schools" (Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Administration, October, 1969).

probably unrealistic, but the idea of local responsibility continues to be viable and important and should be fostered and encouraged.

It should be evident that problems such as these usually cannot be satisfactorily resolved on a local basis, and that the states must assume the major responsibility for developing adequate and realistic policies and provisions that, if properly designed and implemented, will enable and encourage properly organized local school systems to assume the responsibility for developing and implementing adequate policies and provisions for all who can benefit from education.

Importance of Long-Range Planning

In the past, many changes made in national, state and local policies relating to education have resulted from reactions to crisis situations, or from decisions to modify some aspect or component without much consideration of the implications for other closely related aspects. Some of these decisions were based on conclusions reached after careful study of pertinent information, but others resulted from the acceptance of a proposal primarily because it seemed promising, without any serious attempt to determine the implications or probable consequences.

During recent years, we have learned among other things that: (1) changes in any one aspect of a social system such as education have important implications for other aspects and component subsystems; (2) some members or supporters of most organizations tend to resist changes regardless of the need or merit; (3) no static organization can expect to continue to function effectively in a rapidly changing society; and (4) there is a science as well as an art of planning.

Within the past decade, many people have been convinced that comprehensive, systematic long-range planning for the improvement of education is essential, But, thus far, in many state and local school systems, there has been much more discussion than realistic planning largely because: (1) most state and local school systems are still locked into a traditional annual or biennial budgetary system that tends to make longer range planning appear to be difficult or somewhat unrealistic; (2) relatively few people are competent to provide the essential leadership or services; (3) the resources available have already been pre-empted for other important purposes; or (4) some influential people do not distinguish between a planning society and a planned society, and assume that any effort to engage seriously in systematic planning will almost inevitably lead to the latter.

Since each state is primarily responsible for developing adequate provisions for the education of its residents, it should be evident that no state can any longer afford to ignore its obligation to provide the leadership and services needed to ensure effective planning for the improvement of education. Some states have already been held accountable by the courts for their failure to plan appropriate ways to replace obsolete and indefensible provisions and practices with others that can be considered equitable and reasonable in the light of modern conditions and needs.

In this society, no state should expect to attempt to simplify or resolve its problems by (1) assigning the responsibility for planning needed changes in education to a group of experts, no matter how competent they may be, or (2) undertaking to do the planning for local school systems or schools. Let us consider, for example, the very important matter of goals that must be identified and clearly

stated in order to provide a sound basis for developing or revising programs, procedures and so on, and for establishing the accountability that is considered essential under modern conditions. These goals cannot be imposed on the people. If at least representative citizens do not have an opportunity to participate in developing or approving the proposed goals, some of them may not be accepted or implemented. Thus, in planning there is an important role for planning and other experts as well as for those who will be expected to implement the plans. Moreover, planning must always be recognized as a cooperative process--as a means to the end of effecting needed changes.

Finally, if local responsibility for education is to be strengthened as seems essential, local school systems should be expected to plan (with appropriate assistance) and effect improvements in their own provisions and programs. No other agency or organization should expect or attempt to plan for these systems anything that can best be done locally.

Other Important Changes

During the remainder of the time allotted I will comment briefly on a few other changes that seem to have especially important implications for the role of the states in, or relating to, the improvement of education.

We seem to be changing rapidly from a national society concerned primarily with expansion, increased productivity, high pressure selling of products almost regardless of need, and exploitation of human as well as natural resources (without much consideration of the long-range implications) to a society in which there is greatly increased concern about the development and welfare of people and, similarly,

about the carefully planned development and wise utilization of natural resources. As Sweden has already done, we seem to be considering the desirability and potential benefits of allocating a larger portion of our economic resources to the public sector. Any such change would seem to imply the need for reorienting some of our goals and instructional procedures to provide for more appropriate consumer-oriented programs.

The above statements imply that many of the beliefs, values and expectations of the citizens of the nation are changing. That seems to be occurring, even though many schools have continued to emphasize the development of cognitive skills (with mixed success) and seem to have assumed that the development of values should be left almost entirely to the homes, churches or something like osmosis. Although the schools cannot, and should not, attempt to impose values, they can and should assist students to develop their own values by helping them to consider the implications and consequences of accepting different value systems.

The increasing evidence about the disastrous effects of pollution and the impact on the environment for plants and animals as well as for people has led to the conviction that education and educators must not only help students to become informed and concerned about these problems but also help other agencies and citizens generally to improve the environment for learning that may significantly affect the opportunities and progress of students.

There is increasing concern that recent technological developments of many kinds may be used to manipulate and exploit people and control their thinking. That is possible, but there is also a growing demand that the various technologies be utilized primarily

to give people access to information that might not otherwise be available, to help with the process of planning, to increase the progress in learning, and to improve the welfare of people generally.

We apparently have moved from a rather complacent society in which most people generally seemed to accept the "establishment" and its traditional way of making decisions (that frequently has not provided maximum opportunities and benefits to or for the people) to an inquiring society in which people do not hesitate to challenge decisions in which they have not had an opportunity to participate, and especially those that seem to benefit the privileged more than the disadvantaged.

Finally, but obviously not least important, the evidence shows clearly that we have moved from a predominately rural society to one that is increasingly urban and metropolitan. These developments have generated tremendous problems resulting from sheer size, lack of adequate planning, rigid bureaucracies, corrupt or inept political operations, and similar factors and considerations to which most states have given only limited attention. There are growing demands for decentralization, reorganization, special state and federal assistance and so on that can neither be ignored nor accepted merely because they have been advocated by some leaders or even by a substantial portion of the population. How the states can best help the cities resolve their complex and difficult problems relating to education and various aspects of governance must be faced realistically and promptly by the citizens in every state.